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AUTHOR Suggitt, Frank W.
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ABSTRACT

Transcribed in this information report is an address by Frank W. Suggitt presented to a Seminar on Budgeting, Planning, and Development at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Recreation and Park Society, Austin, Texas, November 3, 1967. The improvement of park and recreation facilities and programs as one aspect in community development and land use planning is discussed at length. The situation is described as one in which parks and recreation are increasingly important in the political sphere of activity; funding in this field is an important consideration in the entire budgeting process; questions of state, federal, local, private, quasi-public, and regional roles and responsibilities are of concern to people in high places; and professionals in the parks and recreation field have an inherent responsibility to assume leadership in these three areas and related areas as well. To understand the situation, consideration is given to the emergence of current patterns of land use and community form, dominating influences upon them, and the persistence of land use decisions. Existing trends are projected to view future needs, giving attention to assigning responsibility for land use decisions, and the guidance and direction of land use and community regional development. (BL)

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A PANORAMA OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE PLANNING

By
Frank W. Suggitt

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TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION • TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
H. O. Kunkel, Acting Director, College Station, Texas

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A PANORAMA OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE PLANNING

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A PANORAMA OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE PLANNING[1]

by Frank W. Suggitt[2]

Introduction

Public concern for the broader, external environment in which recreation and park programs operate and the allocation of public funds to such programs have promoted inter-agency and inter-level cooperation. These efforts have demonstrated several things:

1) Parks and recreation are increasingly important in the political sphere of activity.

2) Funding in this field is an important consideration in the entire public budgeting process.

3) Questions of state, federal, local, private, quasi-public, and regional roles and responsibilities are of concern to people in high places.

4) These kinds of questions are an integral part of the consciousness and awareness of everyone who claims to be a professional in the recreation and parks field, and such professionals have an inherent responsibility to assume leadership in these and related areas.

Budgeting and coordinative efforts are synonymous with planning and development, and the responsibility for comprehensive, overall community and regional improvement is shared by all professionals--the improvement of park and recreation facilities and programs as only one aspect. But before we can properly examine the roles of the several levels of government and of the private/commercial/quasi-public agencies, it is necessary to more clearly define the things for which each is responsible. Only then is it meaningful to discuss the implements on the controls and standards with which these responsibilities are exercised.

Let us therefore start at the beginning and consider how the current situation arose, how our communities and their rural hinterlands developed, and then project existing trends for a look at the future.

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[1]An Address Presented at a Seminar on Budgeting, Planning, and Development, Annual Meeting of Texas Recreation and Park Society, Austin, Texas, November 3, 1967.

[2]Professor of Recreation and Parks and Extension Specialist in Resource Development, Texas A&M University.

Emergence of Current Patterns of Land Use and Community Form

No two communities are alike. Each has a different, unique set of circumstances and forces contributing to its growth or decline, its physical layout, and its socio-economic-political uniqueness and individuality. Generalizations are dangerous, so beware of the following, yet try to fit the community in which you live, or the one in which you were reared, into these constructs.

Communities everywhere have been created for convenience in accomplishing the extraction, assembly, conversion or processing and interchange of goods, and for the performance of services. Some communities thus were located at the site of extraction of the basic raw resource, within walking distance of the mine shaft, oil field, lumber camp, or fishing terminal. Other communities were located at points of assembly of the raw resources, at rail heads, ports, or stage coach and wagon train service points, where farm products, mineral products, forest products, or fish and game products were marshalled together for processing and/or transshipment. Still other communities sprang up around centralized processing, refining, distilling, fabricating, and packaging of goods. Interchange of goods implies the movement from point of extraction or conversion to point of consumption, and the great cities of Texas and the World are located at places where many of these economic functions coverage upon a given site.

In each instance, transportation has been a key factor in determining the location of communities, and note that most communities were established before the advent of mass transit or of individualized motor vehicles, so community layouts were initially designed to permit workers to walk from place of residence to place of employment. The presence of water, for navigation, industrial power and processing, domestic consumption, and for disposal of effluent from domestic and industrial uses, has generally been a decisive force in determining where and how communities are located and formed. The foregoing summarizes the rather

cold, economic, resource-oriented reasons for community establishment and development.

There are other bases for community formation, mainly in the field of services. Defense against a common enemy has given rise to forts, naval ports, air bases, clusters of homes around a village square, and some have persisted as communities long after the initial reason for establishment has vanished. The manufacture of defense material has resulted in many permanent communities. In other instances, the need for concentration of governmental services has resulted in communities built around national, state, county, and municipal legislative, judicial, and administrative facilities. Wherever there are concentrations of governmental functions, there are also concentrations of such ancillary services as legal, abstracting, lobbying and special interests. Educational institutions frequently, in themselves, have been located in remote rural areas, but have begot sizeable communities around them, while in other instances they have been located at or near seats of government or centers of manufacturing or transshipment and have added to the momentum of such community growth. Religious institutions, monastaries, seminaries, colleges, meeting grounds, have resulted in permanent communities being built around them. Numerous examples occur in which recreation and tourism, generally under the guise of health-giving waters or air, have generated enduring communities. Look about your state or the continent and you will see many examples of communities being based for the above reasons.

Many decisions to establish communities were based upon geometric or totally capricious factors. Midland, Texas, was a watering stop on the Texas and Pacific Railroad midway between Fort Worth and El Paso; there was no other reason for its being, for it had no running water, and initially no exploitable basic natural resources. Sandusky, Michigan, the county seat of Sanilac County, was located at the geographic center of the county, in the middle of an almost undrainable swamp, as a compromise between several settlements clamoring to become the seat of local govern-

ment; the State Capitol of Michigan was located in a wilderness at Lansing for similar reasons, having been previously in two other locations. "That abominable place - that wretched mudhole - that graveyard of men - the City of Houston! It would be better to legislate in a high, healthy section of this country, than to inhale the poisonous atmosphere; to drink polluted water," so said Ezekiel Cullen to the Third Texas Congress in 1841, in an impassioned speech that reputedly was instrumental in moving the capital from Houston to Austin (quoted in the Houston Post, October 31, 1967, under the caption, "As It Was In The Beginning, It Now And Ever Shall Be.")

The configuration of the terrain --- mountains, rock outcroppings, hills, swamps, flood channels, and dry washes have influenced the shape, form and economy of most communities. The basic land survey system has shaped communities, especially notable where the riparian-oriented land survey of the French and Spanish claims dictated the location of property lines, railroads, streets, county lines, city limits, in contrast to the rectangular grid pattern of the General Land Office Survey. The ownership pattern influences the form of communities, especially the existence of military lands, or of other governmental holdings, or of corporate ownership (especially in company towns in connection with mines, oil, lumber and cotton.) Capricious decisions of individuals are important factors --- to build new plats, or new towns, or new industries, or new facilities, around which a town has grown.

Regardless of the initial justifications for their establishments, all communities have certain characteristics in common, and all have made certain land use allocations and decisions. Districts were set aside for the prime purposes such as stockyards, railroad marshalling and service yards, port and transshipment facilities, manufacturing and processing plants, warehousing, governmental and educational and religious buildings and grounds, military or naval facilities. In close proximity to these primary areas were places for services ancillary to the primary functions, money changers and lenders, commodity brokers,

lawyers, freight forwarders, repairmen and other specialists. Within walking distance were the homes or barracks or tenements for the workers. A compact, central shopping district generally came into being with the first influx of workers, and on its periphery were the first churches, schools, taverns, and various amusement and other civic facilities.

Allocation of land for open space, for either active or passive recreation, or for horticultural displays, was relatively low on the priority of the early community land use decisions. The small, primitive, function-oriented settlements were surrounded by open space and unspoiled lands and waters. Most people worked 60 or 70 or more hours weekly, so there was neither a surplus of time nor of income to devote to pleasurable pursuits. Communities had to be compact and densely settled to enable pedestrial or horse-borne mobility, so strategic sites had a higher economic value for shops or stores or offices or factories or homes than for aesthetic or recreational uses. However, there have been notable exceptions.

Railroads frequently deeded a park site to the community, in the area of the depot, across from what became the main business street of the community. Courthouses were generally situated in an open square, and the town plat centered upon it, with business places ringing the square. Schools and churches sometimes were built on sizeable, attractive sites. In some instances either the municipality or a public-spirited individual or organization donated and improved park or other open space sites, usually with nothing more than a few benches or perhaps a band stand for the Saturday night concert.

Dominating Influences Upon Land Use and Community Form

The confluence of a welter of factors have resulted in the present form and configuration of our communities and the use and development of urban and rural land and related resources. Transportation media, and especially the intersection and interchanging of several such media, have

been outstanding in their influence upon location, function, and form of communities and of rural resource development. A simple country crossroads often begot a school, a church, a cemetery, a general store, and a cluster of homes. A railroad fuel or watering or repair stop frequently led to a stockyard, an elevator, a lumber-coal-feed establishment, and these to stores, schools, churches, and homes. Protected ports and navigable streams gave rise to communities connecting with overland transportation.

Natural impediments to the free flow of transportation gave rise to communities--river fords, ferry and bridge heads, rail or road terminals at the base of mountains or deserts, mountain passes. In communities built around a single rail line or highway or stream, we note a lineal pattern of development. Communities built around the intersection of two or more arterial rail lines or highways are usually more compact, more rectangular, with more clearly defined central business and industrial districts. In the case of some river and port towns, there is a lop-sided configuration due to the limitation of the water, with a resulting concentration near the water front on one side only. Inter-urban train stops and stations became the nuclei for settlements and suburban satellite cities on the periphery of some of the older large cities.

Today, the impact of hard-surfaced roads, and especially of intersections and inter-changes, have freed mankind from the fixation of being forced to live, work, shop, pray, play and be educated and entertained within proximity of the steel rail or within walking distance of all of those places. Popular ownership of individualized and personalized transportation, along with the creation of good roads, has given rise to our sprawling, horizontal, one-story cities and rambling suburbs. New suburban development, be it residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional, follows the routing of the major and minor hard-surfaced highways. Like it or not, the rail, street and road patterns, superimposed upon the earlier patterns of community development,

have resulted in the communities we know today. The continual improvement of highway facilities, both in the congested community center and in the suburbs and rural countryside, thrusts new urban-type development further and thinner into the hinterland.

Persistence of Land Use Decisions

Once established, regardless of how logical or illogical, land use decisions tend to persist. Short rather than long-range profit prospects tend to reinforce the status quo, or to build upon earlier influential factors of community and facility development. Major private and public decisions as to site and location are looked upon as irreversible "sunk investments". Each subsequent decision tends to reinforce and shore up earlier decisions, resulting in a momentum or snowballing that crowds out other considerations. Most of us forget why our communities were situated where they are, and we lose sight of why some grow while others dry up and almost blow away.

Many communities have completely out-live their initial or current usefulness, yet they persist, to a degree, and most of our philosophies lend support to the belief that they should persist. It is easy to say that a community that is dead should be buried, yet there remain some people with roots and recollections deeply imbedded in the emotions of the past, and some of these roots cannot be transplanted. Abandoned mining, lumber, milling, oil field and manufacturing towns are the exceptions, rather than the rule. Community death comes quite slowly to most, a gradual withering of rural-farm-ranch service centers due to changes in the form and scale of agriculture, an insiduous deterioration of the business district as better roads and country-to-city commuting favor the regional shopping center or school or medical center, a decline in the number of business and professional people due to consolidation of schools, churches, banks, livestock sale yards, an aging of the remaining population and facilities, all the result of good roads and motor vehicles which open new areas for employment and service.

A relatively few communities have grown, and will continue to grow, and these few large ones are necessarily destined to continue to get larger in spite of any back-to-the-country emotionalism. Our expanding metropolitan areas are the abode of about three-fourths of the population, and they account for about 90 percent of the population growth of the state or nation. They are built upon and around the vestigial country town that was once a military post or a way station or a river ford or an agricultural gathering and service point. In the process of expanding, the older central cities were forced to grow vertically, then came the car, enabling them to grow horizontally and to engulf other small towns and institutions, over-riding and frequently ignoring the crossing of jurisdictional lines and responsibilities of counties, cities, villages, school districts, watersheds, and river authorities.

Most schools were located within walking distance of the homes of the students, except in the arid, sparsely settled west. Most county lines and county seats were located within a one-day round-trip horseback, buggy or wagon ride of the residents of the county. These locational criteria are no longer valid, yet few institutions are more rigidly entrenched than county seats and county lines. Consolidation of counties and of contiguous municipalities is fully as valid as the remarkable effort that has been made in consolidation of school districts, yet nowhere near the progress has been made. Consolidation of planning efforts, through multi-unit regional planning commissions and councils of government offers considerable promise, but the barriers erected by local special interests are formidable. Consolidation of parks, parkways, and recreational facilities and programs is just barely on the horizon, but the justification is valid. Can the public service sector of our economy afford the luxury of duplication, inadequate service, and high unit costs, when such factors have forced most successful industrial, commercial and non-public service establishments into various forms of consolidations, integrations, and mergers?

Assigning Responsibility for Land Use Decisions

Americans are despoiling the countryside with uneconomic forms of land use development and with far-flung, sprawling communities that are increasingly becoming more untenable and costly. As we permit wanton sprawl of the urban form, we accelerate the deterioration of the out-moded city center where the basic reasons for the existence of the city still must function. Should we blame the businessman or executive, with his livelihood base downtown and his residence in the suburbs? Should we blame the manufacturers, distributors and servicers of automobiles? Should we blame the highway interests and lobbies for ruining both cities and suburbs? Should we blame minority groups who crowd into the city center? Should we blame ourselves, as professional people with positions of responsibility in our communities for not being aware of the tendencies and for not being at the vanguard to bend the trends toward more desirable objectives?

Professional public school people have been largely responsible for the various improvements and the progress in consolidation and curricula development, but they have been so busy lobbying for their interests that they have lost sight of the community in which they function. They have been able to extract increasingly more state and federal support for their school operation, and perhaps herein lies at least a partial answer for the parks and recreation field. Transfer of a substantial share of the financing of public education from local units to the state has resulted in rather rigid performance criteria with regard to the use of those funds; out of this has come pressure and compliance for unified K-12 programs, for minimum curricula and teacher competency standards, for health and safety standards in construction, and other desirable developments.

Every unit of government, city, village, county, state and federal, has recognized and in varying degrees responded to the need to provide recreation sites, facilities, personnel, programs, and funds. Unfortu-

nately, however, it has been an ad hoc, unit-by-unit response, usually lagging far behind even the most limited definition of need. Very few of the planning and budgeting decision-makers at any level of government are aware of the influence that park, parkway and open space can have in changing the shape of both old and new cities, for directing other land use and development decisions toward a more tenable and functional design. Very few of the decision-makers have any comprehension of the impact of imaginative recreation programs in changing the lives of the dwellers of the ghettos or the swank suburban areas or the small towns and country-sides. Almost none of the powers-that-be realize the economic impact of both public and private/commercial recreation upon the tax base, the employment base, and the dollar flow in a community, region, or state.

Creation of awareness of the role and contribution of recreation, parks and tourism appears to be a prime responsibility, to be followed by positive suggestions as to the role and function of each level and unit of government, in coordination with one another and with the private/commercial sector. Professional recreation and park people must themselves become aware, and then must convey this to the city hall, the county seat, the state legislature, and to Washington. The legislative and other administrative people are too busy with other burning issues to take such initiative. The staff and consulting planners cannot be expected to recognize, yet, the potential power of recreation as a unifying and integrating salient in changing the form of cities, of economies, and of lives. Professionals like you must continually call these truths to the attention of other administrators, legislators, special interest groups, and citizens at large.

Delineation of responsibility among the various levels of government is becoming increasingly difficult. The mobility of most people renders the city limits or the county line virtually meaningless as people move out in quest of pleasurable pursuits. This is compounded by the effect of upward income and educational mobility of most people, enabling and

enticing them to range further, more frequently, and to stay longer. Better highways and vehicles are the media by which this mobility is accomplished.

The same forces are at work in the recreation explosion as gave rise to the suburban explosion. The problems and confusion of responsibility in planning, budgeting, and development are comparable. If cities do not extend the sphere of recreation and parks programs beyond the city limits, they will be left with servicing only that sector of the population without mobility, and they will not even be able to do a good job of that, for their territorial and taxation limitations cannot command the outlying recreational resources that are needed to provide well-rounded recreational experiences. Metropolitan regional park and parkway organizations and programs are the only hope for augmenting the efforts of cities and satellite and out-lying communities and counties, with a pooling of responsibility for planning, financing, constructing and operating. Such programs must be coordinated with highway, major street, school, water, and sewer planning and development, for each supports the other. The central city is best equipped to take the lead.

The more rural communities and counties have equally as great problems and challenges. Not only must they better serve the recreational needs of their own residents, but they must also wrestle with terminal and transient visitors (from the metropolitan areas) and their demands for recreational accommodations, attractions, and activities. These smaller units lack professional personnel and they have no program precedent. When a new metropolitan water supply impoundment inundates parts of one or more rural counties, who is to take the lead in basic land use planning or in the provision of public and private/commercial recreation/residential development? Again, the only obvious approach is through a coordinated regional program.

Low income areas and those with a declining economic base, both rural and urban, cannot take advantage of the potential economic and employment enhancement of recreation and tourism on anything short of a regional approach. Hopefully, a pooling of ideas, leadership, and resources can lead to general economic and community improvement, for the one cannot move ahead without the other. Basic to any such program is research to show what potential exists and to suggest alternative approaches. Then an imaginative educational program must make the leadership and the citizenry aware of what must be done and by whom. Can professional recreation and park people assume leadership responsibility?

Guiding and Directing Land Use and Community Regional Development

Relatively few Texas municipalities are availing themselves of the several standard implements for comprehensive planning and development, and the Legislature has not seen fit to place such tools in the hands of counties. The municipal zoning that does exist is generally not in accord with an overall land use plan, or with a master thoroughfare or utility or school or recreation or open space or overall capital improvement plan. Subdivision control, to the extent that is employed (the largest city in Texas has none, nor does it have zoning), is not used as a vital force whereby new development must lead to pleasant, economical, functional parts of the city or suburbs. If building, mechanical, and occupancy ordinances were properly applied, substandard structures would be removed and no more would be built, a major step toward urban redevelopment and a means of acquiring open space for parks, civic facilities, and tax-producing business and modern, multi-level residential property. Design and enforcement of sanitary ordinances, coupled with the foregoing, can prevent building upon flood plains, or can force developers to provide suitable water, sewer and storm sewer facilities, in accord with an overall regional utility and land use plan, and it will assure water quality suitable for recreation. Is it too much to ask that professional recreation and park people familiarize

themselves and their community leaders of these devices which, together with a long-range, comprehensive, park and recreation plan and budget, will make for more desirable, more healthful, and more economic communities.

Another tool within grasp of the professional recreation and park person is the advance acquisition of land for park, playground, school site and parkway purposes. Such advance acquisition necessitates a long-range plan and budget for all facets of the community and region, with recreation and parks being an integral and coordinated part of the whole. Only through this means can recreation and parks exert their full potential in influencing the form and shape of the communities of the future. This involves borrowing on future revenues, and allocating such borrowing to correct current deficiencies as well as anticipating in advance the future requirements. It also involves, depends upon, courage and conviction.

In conclusion, where does recreation and parks fit into the broader environmental panorama, and how can recreation and park leaders assume more decisive roles in community formation and development? Never before has there been such enthusiasm for funding recreation and parks programs, but that notwithstanding, we have equally massive demands for funds for all forms of education, rehabilitation of under-privileged and handicapped people in both urban and rural areas, pollution abatement, transportation, and national defense. Can we lucidly demonstrate that recreation is a partner in these other high priority programs, and that it can, conceivably, reduce the costs of crime, delinquency, urban and rural slums, and the compounding cost of tearing out undesirable development rather than preventing its occurrence in the first place?